

There are generally two approaches to social media policy making. Some nonprofits choose to let their policy evolve over time, only creating new rules when a need arises. Other nonprofits feel more comfortable establishing a clear policy from the outset.

Regardless of the approach you take, here are 10 tips (from mashable.com) to help you avoid PR disasters and focus on what's most important: constituent engagement.

1. Introduce the purpose of social media

All policies need to address what's in it for the reader/user — what should the reader take away after reading the policy? Policy should focus on the things that employees *can* rather than what they *can't* do. This is a switch for those used to writing organizational policy.

But that's the spirit of social media — it's all about leveraging the positive. And that needs to be evident in the policy.

2. Be responsible for what you write

Having the “right” to say whatever you would like online does not remove the consequences of what may come from controversial tweets or posts. Your nonprofit and its representatives need to take responsibility for what they write, and exercise good judgment and common sense.

3. Be authentic

Include your name and, when appropriate, your company name and your title. Consumers buy from people that they know and trust, so let people know who you are.

4. Consider your audience

When you are using Facebook, Twitter, or other channels, remember that your readers include current donors, potential donors, volunteers, community members, as well as current/past/future employees. Consider that before you publish and make sure you aren't alienating any of those groups.

5. Exercise good judgment

Refrain from comments that can be interpreted as slurs, demeaning, inflammatory, etc. The Internet is full of varied opinions, and it's okay to share yours, but you always want to remain in a positive light to as many people as possible.

Your employees should understand that your nonprofit can and will monitor employee use of social media, even if away from the office. Bottom line: good judgment is paramount regardless of whether an employee's online comments relate directly to their job.

6. Understand the concept of community

The essence of community is the idea that it exists so that you can support others and they, in turn, can support you. You need to learn how to balance personal and professional information, and the important role that transparency plays in building a community. Your community shouldn't be an environment where competition is encouraged or emphasized, but rather a platform where your constituents feel comfortable sharing, connecting, and receiving help.

7. Respect copyrights and fair use

This should be a no-brainer, but just in case: *always* give people proper credit for their work, and make sure you have the right to use something with attribution before you publish.

8. Remember to protect confidential & proprietary info

Transparency doesn't give employees free rein to share just anything. Employees who share confidential information do so at the risk of losing their job. At the very least, nonprofits will seriously question the judgment of an employee who shares confidential information via social media. It's a good idea to make sure all of this is clearly laid out in your social media policy.

9. Bring value

Social media will more likely pay dividends for you if you add value to your followers, readers, fan, and users. Use social media to frame conversations around specific issues and make sure your nonprofit's position is understood.

10. Productivity matters

In order for your social media endeavors to be successful, you need to find the right balance between social media and other work. Social media can be a great connection between your employees and your constituents. But, your social media usage won't get you very far if you don't execute on the core competencies of your business.

SAMPLE POLICY WORDING - Policy guidelines from Society for Human Resource Management:

- Don't let personal use of Twitter or other social networking sites interfere with work.
- Employees must get company approval to use Twitter to conduct business.
- Any use of the organization's name, trademarks, logos or other intellectual property must be approved.
- If employees make personal comments about any aspect of the organization's business, their profiles must carry a disclaimer that the views expressed are their own, and not the organization's.
- Tweets may not disclose confidential or proprietary information.
- Example social media policy from [Coca-Cola](#).